



**WARNER IRON FRAME Breechloading Cartridge Carbine (United States Government Trials of 1865 Carbine). .50 caliber (.56-50 Spencer). Finished bright overall. No serial number. Marked on left side of frame: "JAMES WARNER, SPRINGFIELD, MASS., WARNER'S PATENT"**  
 The breechblock is released by pressing forward on a flat (11/16" long) button, which is knurled along the curved periphery. Breechblock swings up and over to right side in usual fashion. Rear sight is graduated for 300, 500 & 800 yards. The 20 inch barrel has 3 wide lands and grooves, with clockwise twist. Overall length is 37-1/8 inches. Sling ring bar on left side of frame is one inch long (center to center of the bar itself). Stocks of walnut. Weight is 6-1/4 lbs. (Andrew F. Lustyik Collection)



**WARNER Breechloading Cartridge Carbine. Marked on the left side of frame: "JAMES WARNER, SPRINGFIELD, MASS., WARNER'S PATENT".**  
 The frame and all usual furnishing are of brass. Fore-end band is of iron, marked "U". The serial number "2971" appears on the buttplate. The top left side and breech frame (front left side) are stamped with a star over the letter "M", in this fashion: ★  
 M  
 "ELG" over a Star appears in an oval frame or cartouche along with the Star over "M" on the left rear side of the barrel, partly hidden by the upper rear side of the fore-end (See picture).  
 The barrel is 27 inches long with usual Warner rear sight, graduated for 300, 500 & 800 yards. There are 5 lands and grooves, with clockwise twist. This carbine appears to have been chambered for a .46 Short Cartridge, although it will readily chamber the .44 Henry or .44 Long. Overall length is 44-1/2 inches. Weight: 7-1/2 lbs. (Andrew F. Lustyik Collection)

# The Warner Carbine

By Robert Howard

The story of the handsome Warner Civil War Carbine may be likened to that of a beautiful maiden without suitors. A product of the ingenious James Warner, this balanced, single shot, breech loading, brass framed martial weapon never gained fame;<sup>1</sup> though its accuracy was acknowledged, there is no evidence that it was ever praised by any military unit firing it.

Much has been written about James Warner; he spent a lifetime in gun factories and was a widely known inventor as well as manufacturer of revolver mechanisms from 1850 through the percussion era and into the early metallic cartridge period of the late 1860s. His career is identified with Springfield Arms Company of Springfield, Massachusetts, which he managed throughout its brief corporate life. Warner and the company produced a variety of percussion revolvers from dragoon size to pocket models and differing types of revolving rifles. Even following the issuance of the injunction in *Colt vs. Mass. Arms Co.* in 1851 Warner "regrouped" and persisted in the production of quality revolvers and successfully avoided, and in some instances possibly infringed, Colt and Smith and Wesson patents.

With this background in arms it comes as no surprise that James Warner designed, patented and produced a martial carbine firing self contained metallic cartridges for the union soldier.

The first patent was dated February 23, 1864, and is numbered 41,732; a copy of the diagram and specification accompanying the patent is attached. Before issuance of the patent, Warner, in association with two Springfield business men, negotiated a contract with the U.S. Army Chief of Ordnance on January 13, 1864, for the sale of 1,000 of the new carbines at a price of \$18.00 each, to be delivered by May 1, 1864. A prototype was furnished for use as an inspector's model in January, 1864.

By the end of June, 1864, the first 1,000 carbines were delivered. Apparently without a written contract, Warner continued to produce these guns and delivered another 500 in November of 1864 at a price of \$20.00 each.<sup>2</sup>

Though some doubt exists, it is generally believed that these first 1,500 pieces were in 50 caliber rimfire, accommodating a special Warner cartridge with a metal case .52 inch in diameter and .85 inch in length.

At this juncture we must distinguish between the two varieties of Warner carbines. One variety was manufactured by Greene Rifle Works at Worcester, Massachusetts, and is commonly known as the Warner-Greene Carbine; the other variety was produced by the inventor at Springfield and for convenience may be labeled the Warner-Springfield. The two types are readily identifiable by the markings on the left side of the brass frames: the Warner-Greene is addressed in two lines "Greene Rifle Works/Worcester, Mass. Pat. Feb. 1864" (with no reference to Warner), whereas, the Warner-Springfield is marked in three lines "James Warner, Springfield, Mass/Warner's/patent."

The differences in the two carbines go far beyond the markings. Though both have a hinged breech block and are almost identical in configuration and equal in overall length (37.5 inches) and weight, (6.75 pounds) and both have 20 inch blued or bright barrels with three groove rifling, the disparity is considerable.<sup>3</sup> The Warner Greene closely follows the patent of February, 1864, and is distinguishable by the following features:



- (1) The hammer serves as the breechblock locking device.
- (2) A conventional sling ring riding on a bar on the left side of the frame.
- (3) A knurled release button on the hinged breech block.
- (4) A spring controlled firing pin within the hinged block conforming to the drawing a specifications of the February patent.
- (5) A stubby extractor stud on the underside of the forearm.

To preserve coherency, we should now turn to Warner's second carbine patent, number 45,660, dated December 27, 1864; drawings and specification are attached. The Warner-Springfields examined by this writer conform to the December patent with the following improvements:

(a) A locking device for the hinged breech block operated by a thumb lever adjacent to the hammer and fitting into a slot on the back of the block; depression of the lever releases the block for upward movement.

(b) Elimination of the knurled button on the left side of the block and substitution of a simple, stationary thumb piece for lifting the block.

(c) Elimination of a spring on the firing pin and utilizing a screw fitting in a groove on the pin to limit the forward and rearward movement of the pin.

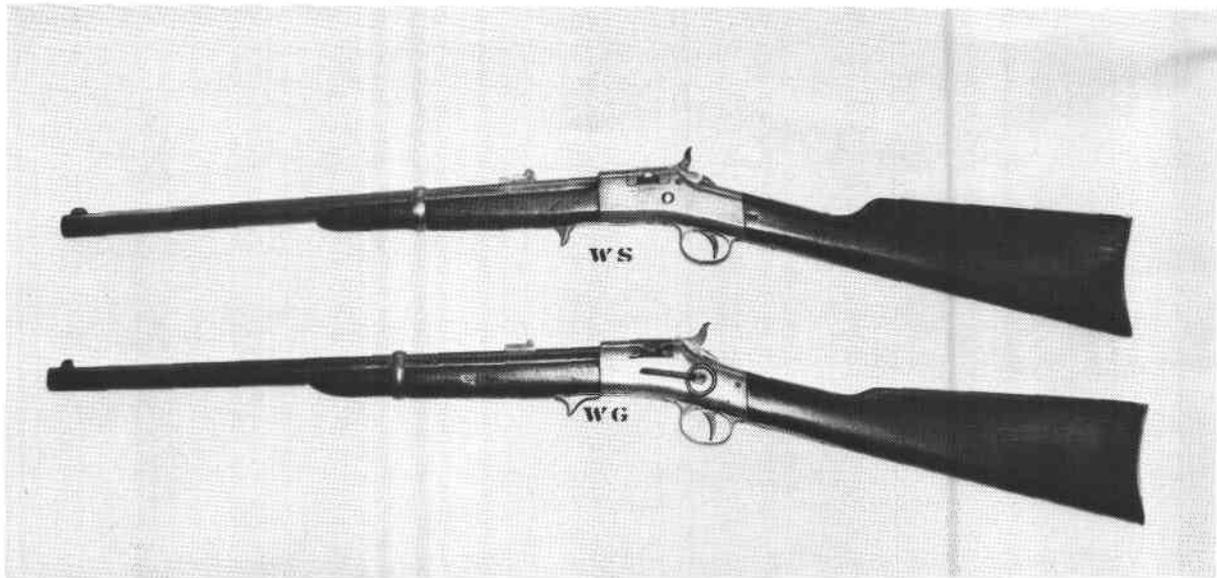
(d) To prevent friction or "snagging" of the pin against the frame in opening the block, a small beveled groove appears on the brass frame forward of the breech block aligned with a protrusion of the firing pin.

(e) Elimination of the saddle ring bar (which could have permitted the ring to interfere with opening the block) and substituting a ring mounted on an eye bolt passing through the frame.

(f) A longer and more graceful extractor stud.

Other differences of a minor nature can be found by a comparison of the two carbines juxtaposition.

Most authorities have assumed that the Warner-Springfield was produced first and followed by the "improved" Warner-Greene. This assumption is obviously erroneous. The Warner-Springfield is clearly an advancement over the Greene variety; further, it is inconceivable that Warner would have produced a superior, un-



The two types of Warner Carbines Top: "Warner Springfield" made by James Warner in Springfield, Massachusetts in early 1865 and chambered for the 56-50 Spencer Cartridge (Saddle Ring removed). Bottom: Warner Greene made by Greene Rifle Works in Worcester, Massachusetts in 1864 and originally chambered for the .50 Caliber Warner Cartridge.

patented carbine in the summer and fall of 1864 and made an inferior one in the following winter after patenting the earlier one; surely, it would have been idle and meaningless to obtain the patent in December, 1864, and then manufacture a carbine conforming to a patent issued the previous February.

Thus, it is safe to conclude that these first 1501 carbines delivered were of the Warner-Greene variety firing the special Warner cartridge. The writer hastens to recognize that a few Warner-Greene's bear a serial number beyond 1500. The system of numbering the Warners has never been understood; no doubt, some Warner-Springfields have a number preceding 1501. Serial numbers have little weight, and are certainly not conclusive, in determining the order of manufacture of these carbines.

In its drive to standardize ammunition, the Union Army Ordnance, in late 1864, settled on the desirability of the famed 56-50 Spencer Rimfire Cartridge for its carbines and the chambers of most of the early Greene-Warners were lightly reamed out to take the larger Spencer cartridge.

In November and December of 1864, Warner was again engaged in negotiations for sale and delivery of more carbines and finally, on the day after Christmas of 1864, an agreement was reached for the purchase of 2500 additional Warners to be chambered to fire the 56-50 Spencer ammunition; all 2500 were delivered between February 2 and mid-March of 1865 at a price of \$20.00 each; inspection was by Major Charles S. Lowell. It is worthy to note that this contract preceded by one day the December 27 date on the second patent. In the opinion of the writer, all of these 2500 delivered in 1865 were Warner-Springfields originally chambered for the Spencer 56-50 cartridge.

The war ended in April, 1865, but James Warner was not through. He produced an improved, experimental version of the early model made with a shorter brass frame, chambered for the 56-50 Spencer, and entered it in the carbine trials of 1865; it finally proved capable of firing 13 shots per minute but was rejected. Further, Warner produced at least one of the late type carbines chambered for the 44 caliber Henry cartridge. Both of these unique carbines are in the collection of our illustrious colleague, Mr. Andrew Lustyik. Warner also made a single shot derringer pistol with a hinged brass breech block following the design of the carbine; this is

very rare and desirable, much sought by the Warner and Derringer collector. Finally, in the late 1860's, Warner produced a metallic cartridge revolver in .30 caliber with a five shot cylinder; production was limited to about 1,000.

The Warner Carbine, like most other single shot breech loading carbines, soon succumbed to the rapid fire Spencer repeaters and the Sharps, Allin conversions, and finally, the Springfield trapdoors as the select arms for the cavalry. Many of these early breech loaders such as the Sharps, Starr, Remington and Maynard are immortalized but the Warner can lay no claim to fame. The Third Massachusetts and First Wisconsin Cavalry Regiments were issued Warners during the closing months of the war and comments on its battle worthiness are unfavorable, though some troops attested to its accuracy.

A forecast of problems ahead is found in this letter from Major Dyer to General Ramsay on April 16, 1864, following the carbine trials of that year:

"In firing Warner's breech loading carbine it was found when the copper case burst that the escape of gas at the Breech frequently threw open the breech piece with great violence, and two carbines were rendered unserviceable after a few rounds.

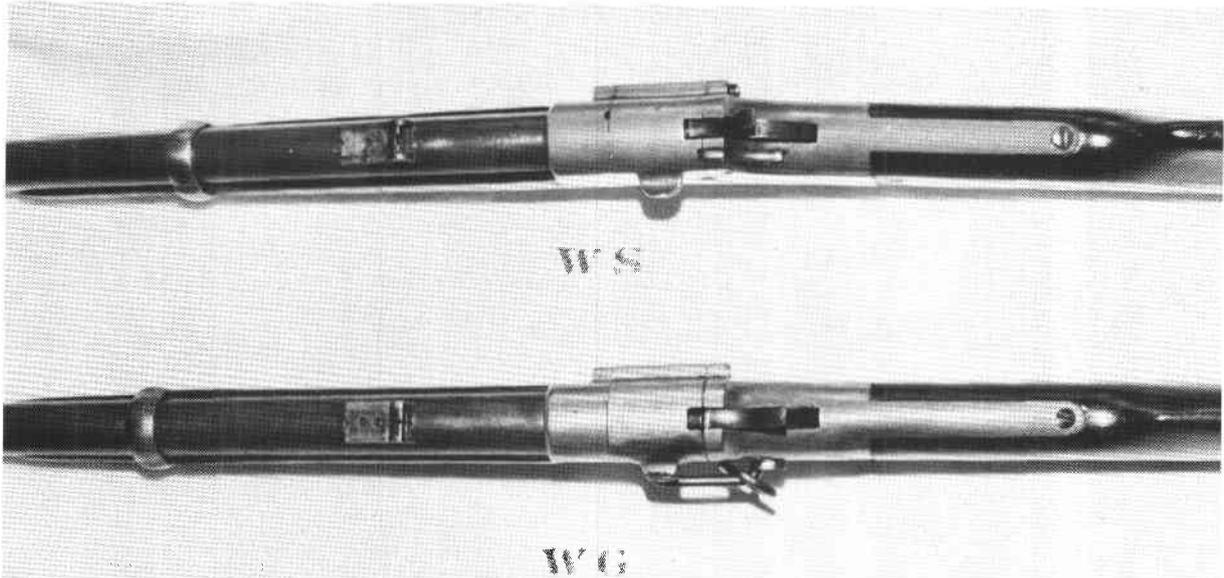
Mr Warner drilled a hole about a quarter of an inch in diameter in the receiver, to allow the gas to escape (sic), and it appears to have corrected the one.

I recommend that all of his carbines shall be altered in that way before being issued to troops."

It should be observed that the gas escape hole on the Warner Springfield is much larger than those found on the Greenes; indeed, it appears that the hole on the Greenes was an alteration.

On January 31, 1865, Major David Bunker of Company C of the Third Massachusetts Cavalry listed many weaknesses of the Warner Carbine in a letter to Major Otis:

- (1) Cartridges had to be pushed in with a screwdriver.
- (2) Required a severe blow on the butt on a log to throw the plunger back so the chamber could be opened.
- (3) The chambers required a severe blow with a stick to open them after firing.
- (4) Ejector sticks-required a screwdriver to remove case.
- (5) Chamber blown off.



Top view of frame and breech block of the two carbines; note the locking device for the breech block adjacent to the hammer of the Warner Springfield and the conventional saddle ring and bar of the Warner Greene; the saddle ring of Warner Springfield is mounted on an eye bolt passing through the frame and has been removed on this piece.

- (6) Stock blown off.
- (7) Breech pins broken

"The accuracy with which these pieces can be fired is astounding and is comparable to the old Sharps Carbines."

Major Bunker's indictment of the Warner was based on testing 26 carbines which were Warner Greenes, since his letter pre-dated delivery of the Warner Springfields. His closing paragraph is interesting and amusing:

"Had time permitted I would have put them to a severer test and will do so yet if you deem it advisable."

Other reports from Companies of the Third Massachusetts were equally uncomplimentary; an example is the report of Company F:

"I also tried firing of the carbines a number of times in succession and was unable to find a single carbine that could be fired 20 times without fault;"

The carbine was termed "defective" by Company B.

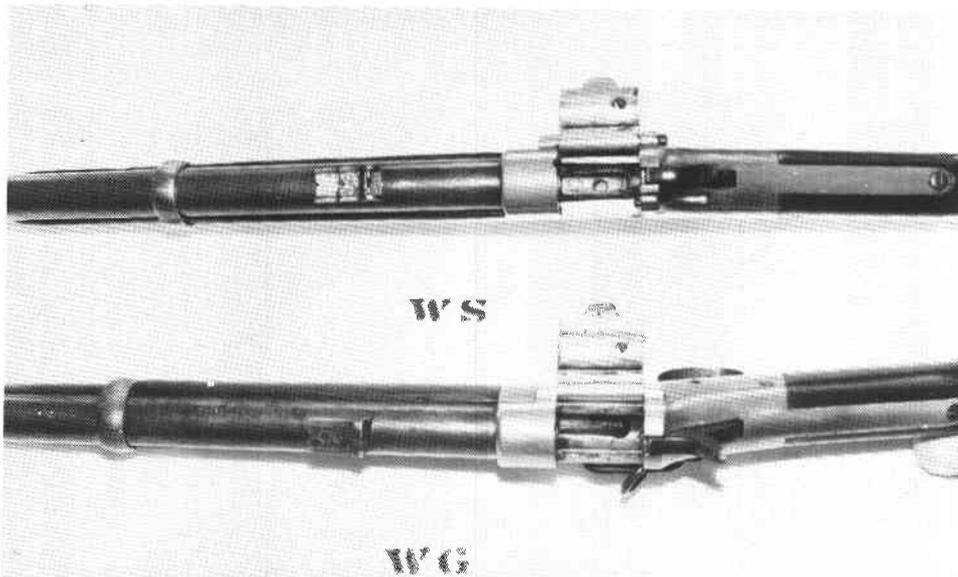
Possibly the Warner cartridges contributed to the problem; in February, 1865, an army inspector at the Washington Arsenal reported: "Cartridges (for the Warner Carbine) the above Regiment (Third Massachusetts) have on hand were made by Crittenden and Tibbals and are not reliable. Many of them contained no fulminate as they failed to ignite after repeated trials. . . ."

The carbines were soon withdrawn from the Third Massachusetts.

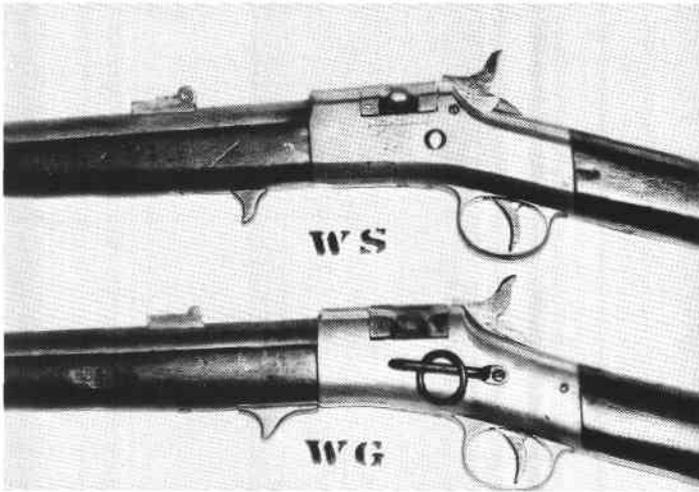
The Warners issued to the First Wisconsin in late 1864 fared some better; the First Cavalry Division to which First Wisconsin was attached reported on February 25, 1865:

"The Warner Carbine works well and shoots accurately, but the springs and the small of the stock of the gun are too weak, and it frequently breaks where the wood and metal joins, there being but a screw to support the strongest strain upon that part of the carbine."

Apparently, reaming the chambers of the Warner-Greene to



Top view showing breech blocks fully opened; note channel on frame forward of breech block to accommodate protruded firing pin of the Warner Springfield.



Side view, showing differences in extractor spurs, sling mounts and (top) breech block locking latch not on lower gun.

accommodate the 56-50 afforded little improvement, according to this report from the Washington Arsenal on November 18, 1864;

"The chamber of the former piece (Warner) was reamed up from .52 inch to .564 inch in order that the cartridge of the latter (Spencer) might be inserted. The bore wasn't altered. The result of firing at 300 yards—very inferior."

It should be observed that all these comments were directed to the Warner-Greenes, with the possible exception of the report of 1st Cavalry Division.

The reputation of the Warner certainly was not enhanced by the French experience with these weapons. Schuyler, Hartley and Graham and possibly other dealers in arms purchased over 2400 of these carbines and sold them to the French Army in 1870; also purchased and delivered along with the guns were hundreds of thousands of rounds of the 50 caliber special Warner Cartridges which were of no use to the re-chambered early Warner-Greenes and the Springfield Warners taking the 56-50 Spencer. This no doubt caused much Gallic profanity with "all those carbines and no ammunition."

French Army reports on the use of the Warner Carbine in the Franco-Prussian War can be found in the book by Pierre Lorain, *Les Armes Americaines de la Defense National, 1870-1871*. These reports tell the story of the useless and defective Warner cartridges. Apparently, over a million rounds were bought and many were destroyed by the Military but some were resold at auctions in 1873 and 1878.

Severe criticism was directed to the Carbine itself; in describing the action, Lorain says:

The action has eight movements:

- (1) Pulling the cock.
- (2) Unbolting the breech with the right thumb.
- (3) "See-Sawing" of the breech on the right side with the left hand.
- (4) Extraction of the case by pushing with the right index on the extraction lever.
- (5) Pulling up the case by hand or "See-Sawing" the weapon.
- (6) Putting in a new cartridge
- (7) Pressing down on the breech toward the left and bolting.
- (8) Action of the finger on the trigger.

The drawings in Lorain's book portray Warner Springfields; he states that the 2500 Warner Carbines purchased were of the "last type" chambered for the 56-50 and the 56-52 Spencer Cartridges and that the major portion of the cartridges shipped were Warner specials for the "first type"; he stated that the arms were "perfectly useless" and "stacked at the Bayonne Arsenal and sold dirt cheap in 1873 along with unmatching Warner Cartridges."

Lorain only mentions the Warner-Greene once, observing that it presented minor modifications from the Warner-Springfields, "particularly a ring on a bar and the absence of a bolt (thumb lever) to lock the breech. . . ."

It is reasonable to assume that most, if not all, of the Warners shipped to France were Warner-Springfields. It must be remembered that many of the Warner-Greenes had been damaged or destroyed or discarded as unfit and quite a few fell victim to Major Bunker's tests.

The Warner Carbine is worthy of our attention for one reason: it is the only arm designed or made by James Warner accepted and purchased by the U.S. Government for issue to military personnel; it is the only truly Martial Warner. Though it failed as an effective battle weapon, it is the most significant of all the many guns produced by Warner.

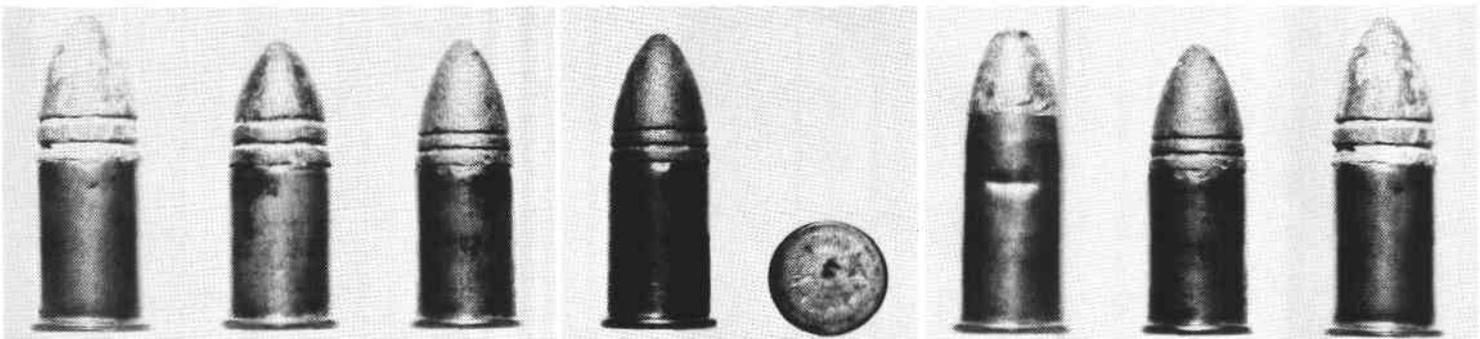
<sup>1</sup>At least one and possibly several of the early prototypes were of iron frame construction. See page 62 of *Civil War Carbines* by Andrew Lustyik for a picture of an early iron frame numbered 9. This rare piece is in the Lustyik collection.

The reader is referred to a splendid article by Mr. Lustyik in the May, 1960, issue of *The Gun Report*.

<sup>2</sup>Inspector cartouches should appear on the stocks of Warners.

Many of the early Warners were inspected by M. Moulton and his initials will appear in several places on both wood and metal.

<sup>3</sup>From an extensive survey and numerous questionnaires covering about 200 Warner Carbines, Mr. Lustyik reports the ratio of bright barrels to blue ones at about 20 to 1.



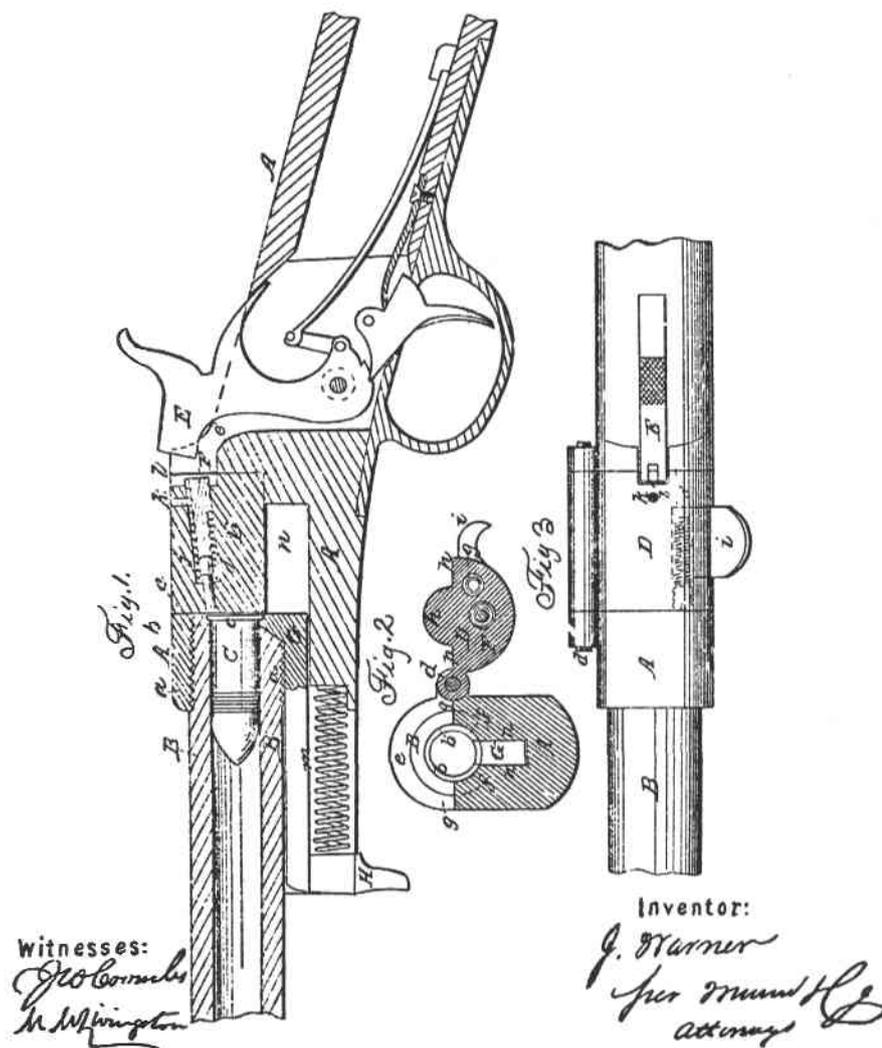
Cartridges for the Warner and Spencer Carbines. 56-56 Civil War era, 56-56 commercial, 50 Warner; 50 Warner, profile & base; 56-50 Spencer, 50 Warner, 56-50 C. W. Spencer.

J. WARNER.

Breech-Loading Fire-Arm.

No 41,732.

Patented Feb. 23, 1864.



B. PETRA, PHOTO-LITHOGRAPHER, WASHINGTON, D. C.

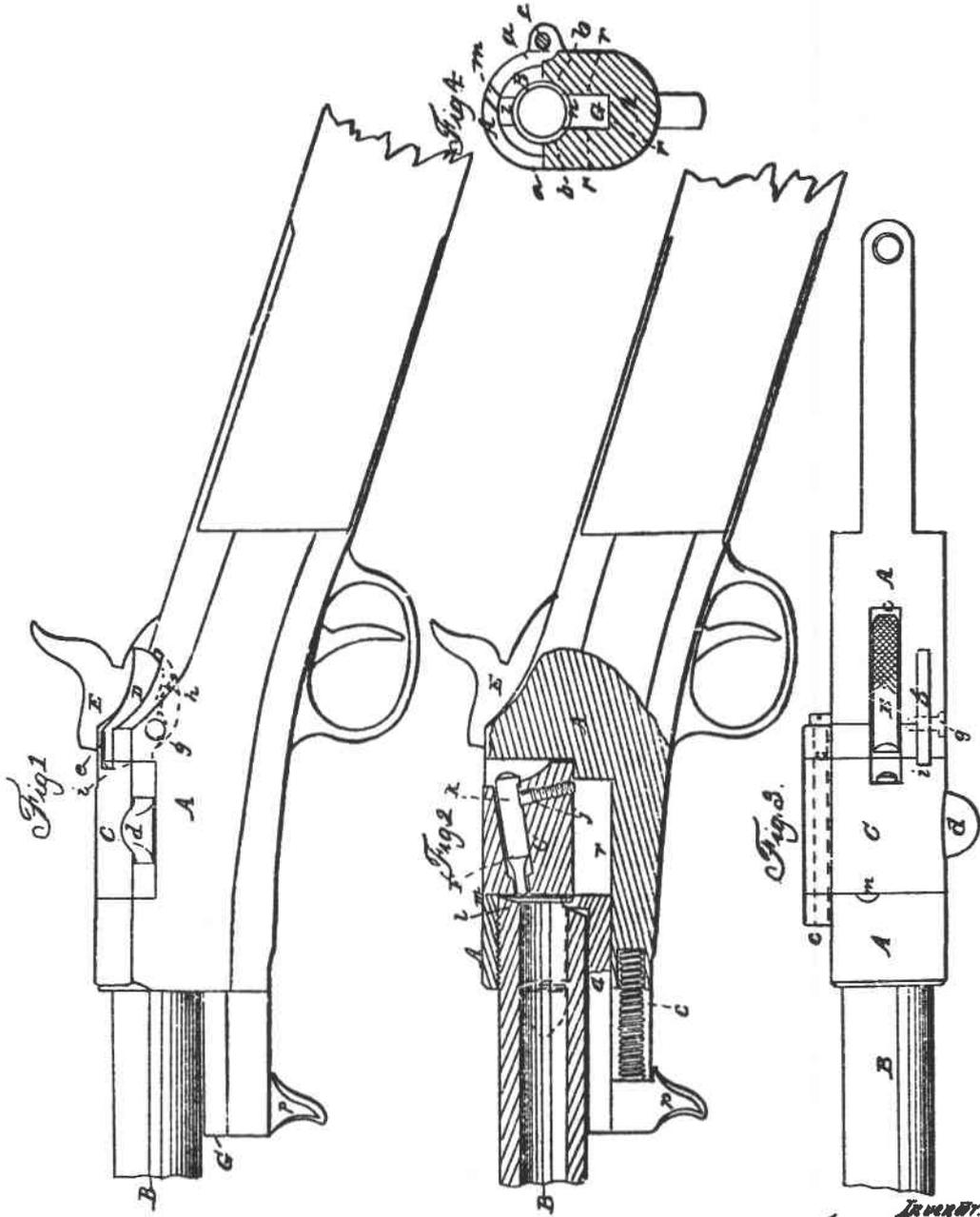
Illustration from first Warner patent of February 23, 1864.

J. WARNER.

Breech-Loading Fire-Arm.

No. 45.660

Patented Dec. 27. 1864.



Witnesses  
J. W. Corbett  
Henry Norris

Inventor:  
J. Warner  
per Munn & Co  
Attorneys

BY PETERS, PHOTO-LITHOGRAPHER, WASHINGTON, D. C.

Illustration from second Warner patent of December 27, 1864.